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Poor People-led/Indigenous People-led Media, Education, and Art - Medios de comunicación, educacion, y arte de lideres indigenas y pobres

The Mysterious Death of John Visor

Tiny - Posted on ***19 August 2017***

Author: tiny/PoorNewsNetwork

"Everyone in the hotel was saying how happy John was, that he would never have ended his own life," power-FULL, superbabymama Stephanie Grant said through tears over the phone. Stephanie, who like John Visor, was a witness to the San Francisco poLice murder of Luis Demetrio Gongora Pat over a year and a half ago, was discussing the increasingly suspicious death of her long-time boyfriend and comrade John in the Mission hotel last week.

"Myself and John's sister Maria Martinez, have spoken with three medical examiners and they all had different stories, first he was sitting on a chair, then he was on a desk, then he had marks on him, then something else, " Stephanie concluded exasperated.

"It is critical that the death of John Visor be examined by an independent agency to uncover any foul play that might have occurred," said lawyer for the people Adante Pointer who has been working tirelessly on this case since the murder occurred, " Anytime someone dies like this we are suspicious about the circumstances given the implications his death may have against the Luis Gongora Pat case against the SFPD," Pointer concluded.

John was a poverty scholar, a street scholar who struggled with houselessness and the trauma that is lodged in our collective heads in this post-colonial gentrified streets of amerikkklan, in this case the stolen village of Yelamu (aka San Francisco), where people like Luis were homeless because of gentrification and an extreme housing shortage.

Myself, my sun and POOR Magazine extended family, artist and organizer Pearl Ubungen had the blessing of meeting john and Stephanie in April of 2016 within days of the murder of Mayan father, uncle Husband Luis Demetrio Gongora Pat as the tent cities surrounding his murder were being poLice harassed because the witnesses, like Luis, were unhoused,. POOR Magazine's village of houseless and formerly unhoused revolutionary reporters and advocates were called in to assist, advocate and do whatever needed to be done to support the witnesses and the unhoused community surrounding the murder. When we arrived on Shotwell near 19th street John and Stephanie were standing in front of their tent while two police officers singled them out, threatening them with tent and belonging removal if they didn't leave immediately, which of course was strange considering no other tents right around them were being targeted in the same way.

Poverty skolaz at POOR Magazine who have all been unhoused ourselves and therefore know the nuanced trauma /drama of what needs to happen to support folks in these moments, began a process along with Pearl and her husband Ken Miller, advocate Laura Guzman, and advocate poverty scholar Nancy Scott to help them store their stuff, raise money, get into rehab and protect them from more police targeting.

At the same time us revolutionary advocates were advocating many of us were working

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alongside writer and organizers Adriana Camarena, Flora Campoy and the family of Luis Demetrio Gongora Pat and many others to form the Justice & Amor 4 Luis Demetrio Pat Coalition in support of liberation lawyer Adante Pointer from the John Burris Law Firm.

The fight for the safety and protection of the witnesses and the victims became connected and enmeshed as they should always be in cases like this. It was at this point that Pearl and Nancy and myself began to focus on getting the about to be mama Stephanie permanently off the streets so she could properly mama, while also working to support John into transitional housing.

Months passed, a beautiful baby was born and a mama was lifted up.

So in the last few months Stephanie has been on track to get housing, raising her baby and supporting John through his own recovery. John got housing at the Mission Hotel, working on recovery and helping out everyone in the Mission Hotel building who needed it.

"He is sweet to everyone in the hotel , always ready to help, always there if you need him and always talking about his future, said an anonymous source to POOR Magazine about John.

"And the timing is all wrong, first his mama said he spoke with him on Wednesday but he was supposedly dead on Tuesday, We just want justice, we just want the truth to come out," Stephanie and Maria stated clearly. "We refuse to be silent."

Please support the Gofundme for John Visor by clicking https://www.gofundme.com/funeral-expences-for-john-visor

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Police brutality and homelessness collide in aftermath of San Francisco killing

The story of Luis Gongora, shot dead by police this week, reflects city's twin crises and raises alarming questions about the official and witness accounts of the shooting

Julia Carrie Wong in San Francisco

Saturday 9 April 2016 13.36 EDT

The morning after a homeless man in San Francisco was shot and killed by police, someone else had moved into his tent. "I can't say nothing," the new occupant said before moving into the small blue and grey tent on the sidewalk. "It's done."

The death of a homeless man on a busy California street is not uncommon. Neither, in a country in which 1,134 people died at the hands of law enforcement last year, are fatal police shootings.

Yet the story of how 45-year-old Luis Gongora was killed this week, pieced together from friends and neighbors - both those who sleep in tents and others who have roofs over their heads - raises alarming questions.

San Francisco police have released few details in a public relations campaign that appears intended to justify, before the completion of any investigation, the decision by two officers to shoot seven bullets from their .40-caliber service pistols.

Many locals in the Mission district of the city knew Gongora merely as a friendly Latino man who was always kicking a soccer ball against a wall.

One person who knew him a little better was the homeless man who, less than 24 hours after Gongora's shooting, was occupying his tent.

Like Gongora, Javier Chab Dzul, 40, was from Mexico. Previously, he had been sleeping in another tent, on the same block, under the same giant Ficus trees that provide shade to around a dozen residents in tents.

Dzul became homeless about a year ago. He spends much of his time painting the street and sidewalk with cheerful designs and flowers. His hands and clothes are splattered with paint.

"He's my friend," he said of Gongora, pointing out how the pair came from the same region of Mexico. "He's Yucatecan too."

Dzul knew little else about Gongora's background, though the two had lived mere yards apart for several months.

The fact Dzul chose to occupy his friend's tent so soon after he was shot dead by police should not, others said, be mistaken for callousness. "It doesn't mean we don't care," said Stephanie Grant, another resident of the encampment where Gongora lived and died. "That's basically how the streets go."

'He called me "hermano"'

Gongora was shot and killed by two police officers on Thursday, shortly after 10.00am.

Police say they were called to the scene by members of the city's homeless outreach team who reported a "suspect waving a large kitchen knife". Two of the responding officers opened fire - first with beanbag rounds and then with live ammunition.

Shortly after the shooting, police chief Greg Suhr told reporters that after the initial volley of beanbag rounds, Gongora "charged" at the officers with the knife. The officers then opened fire with live rounds.

That claim has been disputed by witnesses, including other residents of the encampment such as Grant and her partner John Visor, both witnesses to the incident.

Gongora was transported to a local hospital where he was declared dead around 1pm.

The shooting took place on Shotwell street, the same block as the homeless encampment where Gongora lived.

A few minutes earlier, Gongora had been hanging out in the tent of his best friend, Markale Raybon.

"I can see his face in my head," Raybon recalled Friday, as he sat in his tent - a bright orange shelter next to the one that used to be Gongora's and has now been inherited by Dzul.

Inside Raybon's tent were crammed two collapsible lawn chairs, a child's circus play tent, a shopping cart, a sleeping pad and bedding. A travel toiletry kit hung from the shopping cart.

"We were just hanging out right here smoking pot, and then he walked up the street kicking the ball. The next thing I knew, I heard the throttle of a car, and then I heard someone shouting, and the shots."

Raybon sipped on a soda that another member of the encampment brought him from Burger King. Moments later, recalling his friend, he wept.

"He was my brother. He called me 'hermano'." The pair would help each other out, sharing whatever food or money they managed to come by. "It was half down the middle with everything."

Raybon recalled once seeing Gongora standing on the sidewalk seemingly shouting to himself. He thought his friend had gone "crazy" until he approached close enough to realize that Gongora was using an earpiece to talk on the phone.

That was when Raybon learned that Gongora had childrenwith whom he stayed in touch. In the 24 hours since his death, the homeless residents have

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been trying to join the threads that might help them track down their friend's surviving relatives, but in the absence of resources they have been clutching at snippets of memory.

Grant remembered Gongora also had two brothers and an ex-wife living in San Francisco. She said she thought his brothers were living in housing somewhere, and that the ex-wife was homeless and "lives over by the freeway", but she could not be sure.

'I didn't even know his name'

Another of Gongora's neighbors was a 47-year-old documentary filmmaker named S Smith Patrick, who has lived in a second-floor loft on Shotwell street for 14 years. In all that time, the homeless encampment has been "a permanent fixture", she said, although the number of temporary residents ebbs and flows.

Patrick is heavily pregnant, and lives in the apartment with her partner and six-year-old son.

The presence of a homeless encampment outside their door hasn't been too much of a bother to the family. Once, she thought someone from the encampment had stolen her bicycle, but when she confronted them, they assured her that they knew her and wouldn't steal from her. They also offered her some of their bike parts.

"We never had a problem with him," Smith said of Gongora. She recalled how her young son would sometimes practice the Spanish he learned in class with the homeless man.

But the acquaintance with the man who kicked the soccer ball against the wall only went so far. "I didn't even know his name," she said.

Smith's block of Shotwell street is a cross-section of San Francisco's contradictions.

In the short stretch of road there are remnants of the Mission district's old industries - a warehouse, a utility company parking lot, an auto body shop. There are residential lofts inhabited by artists and young families like Smith's. There are tech company startup offices and construction crews converting former lofts into additional office space. And there are the homeless.

Other occupants of the block's homes and businesses shared similar stories of the soccer-ball kicking homeless man they saw everyday.

"We had interacted with him," said a neighbor who lives in the same building as Patrick and asked not to be identified. "He was a really decent fellow, not violent. We never worried about him."

"My husband kicked a ball back to him the day before it happened," a woman who works at one of the offices on the street said Friday morning. She had just finished writing a message on the makeshift memorial that has been erected at the site of Gongora's death. "I had a good cry this morning."

San Francisco's mayor Ed Lee, who has struggled to cope with both the claims of police brutality in the city and the issue of homelessness, said on Friday that Shotwell street's tents would be taken down.

"Once the various investigations have finished collecting evidence and completed their interviews of witnesses, I will be ordering the Shotwell camp to be taken down and for it not to come back," he told the San Francisco Chronicle. "When it comes to public safety, I'm not going to compromise with these camps."

By no stretch of the imagination

Earlier Friday, San Francisco police officials convened a press conference to reiterate their claims that Gongora had "charged" at the police officers who killed him with a knife.

Commander Greg McEachern reportedly said that one witness "saw the suspect stand up and lunge at the officers", and that another said that Gongora "rose up with a knife in hand and ran toward the officers".

Police also presented reporters with a photograph of the 13-inch butcher knife they said Gongora was carrying.

The San Francisco police department has faced intense criticism since December, when five police officers shot and killed 26-year-old Mario Woods, another man allegedly armed with a knife. Bystander video of that shooting appeared to contradict the police claim that Woods raised the knife toward one of the officers before the group opened fire.

The Woods shooting remains under investigation, and the police commission has initiated a process to update the department's use-of-force policy.

The police department's insistence that Gongora "charged" at the officers with a knife has already prompted several witnesses to come forward to challenge that account.

Patrick, the woman who lived opposite Gongora's tent, and whose six-year-old son occasionally spoke with him in Spanish, is the latest to contradict the police's version of events.

Her account, one of several provided to the Guardian, all of whom have contradicted the police's account, could be the most significant to date. Patrick saw the shooting from her apartment window, where she had an unobstructed view of the incident as it unfolded directly across the street.

"He never charged them. There's no way they were going to get hurt from the knife," she said, adding that she is "enraged" by the police department's version of events.

Patrick posted a widely shared account of the incident on social media network Nextdoor.com shortly after the shooting. However, she said she began to doubt herself after reading news reports that quoted police chief Greg Suhr saying that Gongora had moved toward the officers with a knife.

Patrick said she assumed that Gongora had threatened the police further down the street, before she looked out the window. She assumed she must have seen an incomplete segment of the incident.

But she changed her mind Friday after viewing surveillance video obtained by the San Francisco Chronicle. The video shows the police cruisers arriving on the scene and provides audio of the gunfire, which began just 30 seconds after the officers exited their cars.

The footage did not show the shooting itself, but it was enough to convince Patrick that she had witnessed the incident in its entirety.

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Patrick said that she was sitting at one of four windows in her apartment when she heard someone shout, "Get on the ground." She ran to the next window and saw Gongora.

"He was on the ground, crouched with his head between his knees," she said.

She saw two police officers standing about 20 or 30 feet from Gongora, one carrying what looked like a rifle and the other with his hand at his belt. She heard two shots fired from the rifle - a less-lethal weapon that fires beanbag pellets - and then "live ammunition" being fired concurrently with additional beanbag rounds.

Patrick said she could differentiate the different types of ammunition because of her experience working as a film-maker in the West Bank.

"He didn't get up until they were shooting," she said. "I would by no stretch of the imagination say that he was charging them. His body was recoiling from bullets."

Patrick said that the police officers were moving "parallel" to the street, toward Gongora, but that once he stood up, he was moving "perpendicular" - as if to cross the street - until he fell. "It was after he was shot several times that the knife kind of fell from his body. I don't know if it came from his hand or his pocket, but he was never like this to somebody," Smith said, miming holding a knife up as if to threaten someone.

She added: "It's like they came out shooting. It's complete bullshit what's happening. There's no way that somebody deserved to lose their life."

Patrick's account of the shooting fills in key details that are missing from the surveillance video, which does not show the police officers while they were shooting or any view of Gongora.

It also corresponds with the account of another neighbor who said that he saw the entire incident from his kitchen window, also across the street.

"I watched the whole thing. It was absolutely fucking terrible," said the neighbor, who asked to remain anonymous out of fear of police retaliation. "I was at the kitchen window and it all started. They shot him with the bean bag, and he turned to block the shots and gestured, like, 'What the fuck?' And that's when they shot him."

The neighbor added: "He was not really threatening. He wasn't running at them with a knife or anything like that. They just jumped right out and 20 seconds later he was dead."

Last rites

On Friday morning, Gongora's friend, Stephanie Grant, sat in the large blue tent steps from where Luis Gongora's blood is still visible on the sidewalk.

She was exhausted. She too is pregnant, due to give birth on 1 June, and the events of the previous day - witnessing her friend's killing, recounting the tale to police and journalists - had been overwhelming.

But Grant is determined to tracked Gongora's family members so that his body can be released from the morgue.

The rituals we use to mark the end of a life seemed far out of reach for Gongora's friends. The people who knew him best have no legal right to claim his body. Even if they could, they have no money to pay for his burial.

A priest from the neighborhood has offered to set up a fundraiser, and Grant said she hopes that will make the difference.

"People won't give money to us because they'll think we'll just steal it," she said. "We're not like that. It would mean a lot to me if he had a proper memorial."

If you have information about this incident please contact julia.wong@theguardian.com

An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated the distance between the police officers and Gongora. This version has been corrected

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